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An Oration, Pronounced at Wiscasset, on the Fourth of July, 1804

Alden Bradford

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Thos Willington Esq

PAMP 166 C. 2

Vickery

Ex dono Patris

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Mr. BRADFORD'S

ORATION.

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EXHIBIT

NO. 1

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AN
ORATION,

PRONOUNCED

AT WISCASSET,

ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1804,

IN COMMEMORATION OF

AMERICAN

INDEPENDENCE.

By ALDEN BRADFORD.



WISCASSET:
PRINTED BY BABSON AND RUST.

1804.

ALDEN BRADFORD, Esquire,

SIR,

THE Committee of Arrangements for the Celebration of the Anniversary of American Independence, as the organ of their assembled fellow-citizens and at their unanimous request beg leave to tender you their warmest thanks for the *spirited and elegant Oration* delivered by you this day, and solicit the favour of a copy thereof for the press.

NYMPHAS STACEY,
DAVID PAYSON, } COMMITTEE.
JOHN MERRILL, Jun.

Wiscasset, July 4, 1804.

GENTLEMEN,

EDUCATED in the bosom of freedom, I feel strongly attached to it, both from sentiment and habit.— Should this Address (composed upon very short notice and in a debilitated state of health) serve in any measure to recommend the principles and blessings of rational liberty, and to lessen the evils of that which is false and spurious, I shall attain the object of my wishes in submitting it to publication.

With sentiments of personal consideration,
I am, Gentlemen, &c.

A. BRADFORD.

To NYMPHAS STACEY,
DAVID PAYSON, and
JOHN MERRILL, jun. Esq'srs.



An Oration, &c.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THE great events which give interest to this day—which call for mutual gratulations among ourselves, and for our devout acknowledgements to heaven—are too well known to require particular recital. One may behold many now present who were active in our late struggles for freedom, in the hazardous scenes connected with the Independence of our Country. And those of us who bore no part in the magnanimous exertions and sacrifices, which, through the blessing of providence, preserved our civil liberties, have often heard the eventful story of the revolution from our aged Sires. History has also taken charge of the subject; and faithfully records the interesting circumstances, which terminated in the establishment of our rights as an independent Nation. Nor can the people of America ever forget the important period when our country indignantly opposed the tyranny of a foreign kingdom, and assumed the privileges, which heaven had destined we should enjoy. It will always be a memorable æra in the annals of our nation.

THE principles which actuated the illustrious patriots of *seventy-five*, in defence of our civil liber-

ties, we trust, are yet highly appreciated by the citizens of America. The love of freedom, we continue to cherish with sincerity and zeal. Accustomed from our earliest years to enjoy the benefits and to approve the principles of a free government, we must look back with satisfaction and exultation to those perilous times, when the heroes of our country successfully resisted the encroachments of arbitrary power, and secured for themselves and posterity the rich blessings of national freedom and independence. By the recollection of those important events, which this joyful anniversary brings to view, we are confirmed in our attachment to civil liberty, and our pious gratitude to heaven is excited for its favors toward us as a nation.

LIBERTY is our birth-right. The inheritance is derived to us from our revered ancestors. They were ever its zealous friends and advocates. To these once wild and inhospitable shores, they voluntarily fled, that they might here enjoy its blessings, unmolested by the severe restraints of despotism.—And though attempts were frequently made to oppress and enslave them, they nobly stood forth in defence of their inestimable privileges ; and heaven crowned their virtuous exertions with success.

WE fully justify them in their zealous attachment to liberty : For we are not insensible of its value. In the estimation of Americans, it ranks highest among social and political blessings. We should consider no exertions too great to promote its interests, or to secure its benefits. We have known and enjoyed so much of its privileges, that no considerations can induce us to relinquish them. We

should readily place our property and lives at hazard in defence of freedom, whenever invaded by the ruthless hand of tyranny.

BUT strong as is our affection for liberty and determined as we are to combat oppression and despotism, we are yet liable to the loss of our civil and political privileges. And the danger is in truth the more alarming, as we appear ignorant of the means by which the evil will probably be effected. From the open and direct attacks of tyranny, we have little to apprehend. Our feelings would at once take the alarm; and we should make a bold and resolute stand against its progress. But we are not sufficiently aware of the hazard, to which our liberty is exposed from the insidious conduct of its pretended friends, and from our inattention to the means necessary to its preservation.

LIKE all other blessings, which are our portion in this world, civil freedom is liable to gross perversion and abuse. It is the nature of man to be dissatisfied with present advantages and to seek for those which are ideal; or which are incompatible with social and moral obligation. Impatient of reasonable and just restraints, and actuated by a spirit of insubmission to all external authority and power, we frequently oppose measures essential to the support of true freedom and the rights of our fellow-men. We often imbibe false opinions respecting the nature of civil liberty, which are productive of the most fatal consequences. The *extreme* of liberty, for which many have contended, always leads to licentiousness and anarchy; the evils of which are equally deleterious as those of the severest despo-

tism. Without the restrictions of law and government, this important boon would become the scourge of mankind; and the world would be converted into a theatre of violence and blood.

THE liberty, which virtuous minds approve, is in perfect harmony with the rights of others, with the tranquility of society and the obligations of virtue. Never did our illustrious ancestors disregard these considerations. Never did they act in repugnance to such correct principles. In their most zealous struggles to support the liberties of the country, the legitimate powers of government were respected and maintained. Whilst they disdained to be the vassals of a despotic Prince, they were satisfied with the enjoyment of rational freedom, and anxiously guarded against licentiousness and insubordination.

If we be solicitous, at the present day, to preserve the blessings of our free, republican governments, we must, like our respected ancestors, guard against the abuse and the *extreme* of liberty; and contend for our rights as individual citizens, consistently with the authority of the Constitution and the laws. Should we suffer our passions to be inflamed by groundless clamours, and pursue fallacious schemes of liberty, the consequences will prove destructive to the peace and happiness of the nation. Popular governments, both in ancient and modern times, have been destroyed by the intrigues of a few aspiring individuals, who have imposed on the credulity and ignorance of the common people; and afterwards raised themselves to supreme power by trampling on the rights of those, for whose welfare they had professed particular regard.

FROM this quarter the *real* friends of republicanism have much to fear. Calculating upon the jealousy of the people towards their Rulers, and their natural impatience under the restraints of government, the disappointed and ambitious excite unreasonable alarms in the minds of their fellow-citizens; and thus deprive them of confidence in their superiors and render them disaffected to the lawful authority of the state. They deceive the people with wild theories of civil liberty altogether imaginary and impracticable. The most virtuous and worthy—men who have long been devoted to the good of the country—are represented as tyrants: And the public confidence is unjustly transferred to those, whose merit consists in specious promises and professions. And having obtained the good opinion of the people by boasting and flattery, their great object is, not to promote the *interests*, but to secure the *favor* of the public. An occasion is thus presented for intrigue and corruption. Integrity and virtue are neglected, and favors are lavished on the importunate and obsequious. In the various contentions for power, true freedom is disregarded; and unlimited power is established in the person of some fortunate individual; or anarchy succeeds with all its horrid effects, leveling the barriers of government and rioting on the property and rights of mankind.*

IN ways and by means like these, if we may credit the most authentic histories, free governments have been overturned and the civil liberties of mankind destroyed. The Republics of *Greece* and *Rome* were annihilated by the intrigues of ambitious

* See Note A.

individuals, whose thirst for power stimulated them to the most dishonorable and deceptive conduct.* The characters of Magistrates regularly clothed with authority were basely traduced; and specious promises bestowed on the people to obtain their affections and confidence. And destitute as they were of real patriotism and virtue, upon their elevation to office, corruption and misery prevailed, and liberty was but an empty name. The *Jewish* nation in ancient days, exhibited a similar picture of intrigue, of ambition and ingratitude. The men, whom *Jehovah* had expressly designated to govern, were censured and opposed in the faithful performance of their duty by those who coveted the powers of government for themselves.† The profligate *ABSOLVM*, who aspired to the throne of his father, attempted to gain the object of his ambition by calumniating the virtuous monarch, and by deceiving the people with flattering professions of attachment to their welfare.

THE like arts of delusion were put in requisition in the earliest period of our world, when the first human pair were placed in the delightful garden of *Eden*. Though surrounded with all the blessings which their nature capacitated them to enjoy, and indulged with every favor which infinite wisdom and goodness saw fit to bestow, they suffered themselves to be beguiled from the abodes of happiness and peace by the plausible but false doctrines of the *Prince of darkness*, the enemy of all authority except his own, and the great disturber of the moral and intellectual world. Assenting to his suggestions, that their freedom was arbitrarily abridged,

* See Note B.

† See Note C.

and foolishly imagining that his directions would lead to greater degrees of felicity, they ungratefully rebelled against their lawful sovereign; and thus forfeited substantial good, and exposed themselves to all the evils of corrupt and unbridled passions.

IN our own times, we have witnessed the dire mischiefs produced by an inordinate lust of power and by the influence of erroneous opinions respecting *the rights of man*. We have seen the people of a great nation in *Europe* become the dupes of designing men, who made uncommon pretences to patriotism merely with the view of promoting their own power and aggrandizement.* The cry of *liberty and equality* was reiterated to please the populace, at the same time that the most cruel deeds were perpetrated, and measures adopted most hostile to true freedom. The infatuated multitude were made to believe they were free, whilst impious tyrants, under the mask of republicanism, were riveting their chains more firmly than they were ever bound in the reign of monarchy.

THE mistakes and errors of other countries afford to the people of *America* a useful and instructive lesson. From their history, we may learn the danger and the evils, to which our republican governments are exposed. Whilst we zealously cherish a love of freedom, which cannot indeed be too deeply rooted in our hearts, and firmly resist any usurpations and any arbitrary conduct of our rulers, it is necessary that we pay a sacred regard to the principles of the Constitution and to the lawful authority of government. This is indispensable to the per-

* See Note D.

fect enjoyment of our civil rights and privileges.— Neither liberty, property nor life would be secure without the friendly aid of government.

THAT the people are the proper source of power, and that it is delegated from them to the magistrate for the security and advancement of the common good, is undoubtedly a just and correct position. But nothing can be more dangerous to the true interests of freedom than the novel doctrine of *new-fashioned* republicans, that the hasty opinions of the populace are infallible ;* especially when imbibed under the influence of passions inflamed by artful men, and of misconceptions respecting the motives and conduct of their Rulers, in consequence of ungrounded and false reports. Should we admit this opinion and practice conformably, our patriotic and upright rulers would be frequently censured for the most wise and salutary measures. They would be driven from office by the breath of popular *prejudice* : and *the doors of honor and profit burst open to those*, who should stoop to the arts of flattery and deception. The *name*, rather than the *spirit* of liberty would be regarded ; and our free and happy governments gradually undermined by corruption and cabals.†

To prevent such an unhappy state of things and to preserve the blessings of rational freedom, it becomes important that we give power and confidence to none but enlightened and virtuous characters, who can discern the best means of promoting the interests of the nation ; and who possess patriotism and fortitude sufficient to pursue them. We should frown

* See Note E.

† See Note F.

upon the officious disturbers of the public harmony, and endeavor to check the baneful spirit of calumny and falsehood, which threatens the destruction of social order and good government.

It is requisite also to the preservation of true freedom, that the people be well informed and virtuous. Free governments cannot long exist, unless morality and virtue *generally* prevail; and the people have information to distinguish between their real and pretended friends. A corrupt and vicious people will be likely to elevate those of the same character to places of authority and power in the State: and heaven in its just visitations for their crimes will not permit them long to enjoy blessings, of which they shall have rendered themselves utterly unworthy.

It is important likewise to recollect that the principles and institutions of our holy religion afford a most happy influence in favor of civil liberty.—They are essential to the support of a pure morality*: And they have a tendency to strengthen all the benevolent and social affections, without which the privilege, we so highly value, would only prove an occasion for oppression, violence and outrage.—If we be anxious, then, to enjoy and to perpetuate the blessings of freedom, we must respect the religion of our fathers, and with sincerity conform to its divine precepts.

To accustom the irregular passions of youth to the wholesome restraints of reason and virtue—to inculcate on their expanding minds the necessity of subordination and obedience to their superiors—

* See Note G.

teaching them to respect the aged and to esteem the honorable—is another mean of incalculable advantage towards preserving the blessings of equal liberty to our country. And here is an opportunity for the exercise of the talents and for the display of the virtues of the *female sex*. On them principally devolve the labors of this painful, but pleasant duty. And by their exertions directed to this important object, they will *deserve well of their country*, and prove that they are essential to the welfare of social, as well as to the happiness of domestic life.

BUT a correct and faithful view of the present state of manners in our country, would furnish a picture, I apprehend, in many respects the reverse of this. Sufficient attention is not bestowed on these means of preserving our social and civil privileges.—To gain our affections and applause, the unprincipled politician flatters us with an exaggerated account of our virtues; and would persuade us to assent to the modern and dangerous opinion, that the profligate and immoral in *private* life are equally qualified to direct our national and public concerns, as the most deserving and worthy. A more erroneous and mischievous sentiment was never, perhaps, suggested by the ingenuity of man. For with all their professions of philanthropy, it is impossible that men destitute of moral principles and enemies to Christianity should ever be the friends of human happiness. Our divine religion is also treated with scoffing opposition or silent disregard. And in some instances the profane and impious are loaded with favors and clothed with the high authority of civil government.—Should evils like these increase—should irreligion and in-

fidelity abound—should merit be neglected and persecuted—should flattery and intrigue be the only means of securing the public favor—should hypocrisy and ambition under the garb of patriotism, enable men to ascend the heights of honor and power—we may bid farewell to the liberties of our country and to the blessings of true republicanism. Nor does it require the spirit of prophecy to foresee, that should the ark of our freedom once be committed to the *tempestuous sea* of anarchy, it will be driven about by the storms of ambitious passions and finally buried in the gulph of despotism.—

“Do I forbode impossible events
And tremble at vain dreams? Heaven grant I may!
But th’ age of virtuous politics is past,
And we are deep in that of cold pretence.
Patriots are grown too shrewd to be sincere,
And we too wise to trust them. He who takes
Deep in his soft credulity the stamp
Design’d by loud declaimers on the part
Of liberty, *themselves the slaves of lust*,
Incurs derision for his easy faith
And lack of knowledge; and with cause enough.
For when was public virtue to be found,
Where private was not? Can he love the whole,
Who loves no part? He be a nation’s friend,
Who is in truth the friend of no man there?
Can he be strenuous in his Country’s cause
Who slight the charities, for whose dear sake,
That Country, if at all, must be beloved.”*

BUT with all these impressions of alarm—with all these presentiments of impending evils, it would illly become the friends of liberiy and virtue to despair. We still enjoy some evidences of the divine favor. The altars of God are not yet profanely overturned. Many remain in our Country who

* See Note H.

have not bowed the knee to Baal ; nor have yet been persuaded to give up the glorious and consoling truths of christianity for wild theories engendered in the corrupt imaginations of men, tho' dignified with the name of *Deism*.

As in the former tranquil and happy days of our Country, we are still blest, we trust, with some Rulers of sincere patriotism and piety. The present Chief Magistrate of *Massachusetts* would have been considered an ornament to the high office he sustains, even in the best days of the Commonwealth.*

It belongs to us, fellow-citizens, to respect the pure principles and the excellent characters of our fathers, who, under the smiles of heaven, secured to us our present invaluable privileges ; and to aim at a faithful imitation of their civic and moral virtues. We should anxiously appreciate the services of the illustrious WASHINGTON and his worthy co-adjutors in the cause of freedom, and live under the influence of their wise and excellent maxims. Vain and ineffectual are our professions of attachment to liberty, if we do not subdue the unsocial and selfish passions, and cultivate patriotic and virtuous principles. We should endeavour to check the violence of party contentions and to *restore harmony to social intercourse*, so far as is consistent with independent minds and our convictions of truth. In a word, the great duty, which devolves on us as citizens and as christians, is to unite our exertions to arrest the progress of infidelity and vice—to restrain the vile spirit of calumny—to disseminate correct principles of civil liberty—to oppose the swelling torrent of licentiousness—and to restore and perpetuate the triumphs of political truth and *federal republicanism*.

* See Note I.

NOTES.

[4.] The French nation furnish an affecting and humiliating instance in point. After years of uncommon oppression and suffering, during the alternate triumphs of numerous and successive *factions*, they are obliged to submit again to the heavy yoke of despotism.

[B.] Among the *Athenians*, PISISTRATUS sought the sovereign power by first gaining the affections of the people, by deceitful caresses. He forfeited his honor that he might rise to power. But he could not long maintain his popularity by all his artifice.—The *Athenians* generally loved licentiousness under the name of liberty; and often insulted the laws and the magistrates, who had too little power to prevent becoming the sport of a popular assembly.—Soon after PISISTRATUS, arose ARISTIDES and THEMISTOCLES, who had great influence in conducting the public affairs. But they were very different in their characters. ARISTIDES (to whom Mr. ADAMS, lately President of the *United States* has been often likened) possessed irreproachable virtue, and detested whatever was not consistent with truth and justice. *His desire was to be really just, not merely to appear so.*—THEMISTOCLES, full of fire and ambition, was not scrupulous about the means, provided he could secure success: Less anxious to deserve than to procure admiration; and making his principles easily bend to times and circumstances. It was his great object to flatter the people; and thus to gain their affections, which he was sensible would otherwise be bestowed upon ARISTIDES, who was so really deserving.—The unyielding virtue of the latter deprived him of the fickle applause of the populace; whilst the other, by his flatteries, was long the object of general admiration. Yet he was afterward supplanted by one more acquainted with the arts of deception. [See *Milloy's history*.] Many of the best Patriots of *Rome*, as CINCINNATUS, FABIUS and CATO, were often loaded with severe censures by their fellow-citizens, at the instigation of the ambitious, who sought places of power by flattering the lowest classes of the people. And CICERO has observed, that superior merit was exposed to persecution in the antient republics.—The infamous CATALINE formed a plan of seizing the sovereign authority: And to accomplish his purpose, employed the deepest dissimulation and every art of corruption. The giddy Multitude, says the ABBE MILLOT, as well as the disappointed and ambitious eagerly joined his party; and were amused with promises of greater freedom and happiness. It was by address and intrigue that JULIUS CÆSAR prostrated the liberties of the Roman republic. His attacks were in truth more bold than those of others—yet his success must be attributed to his great dissimulation; and to the semblance of patriotism which he wore to cover his ambition.

[C.] The sixteenth chapter of Numbers contains a particular account of the rebellion and conspiracy of *Korah*, *Dathan* and others against *Moses* and *Aaron*; and it would afford much useful instruction to the demagogues of the present day, who talk so much about the severity of Rulers, and boast of their own wishes to relieve and improve the situation of the people.

[D.] In the first stages of their revolution, many of the citizens of *France* were evidently actuated by views friendly to liberty: But the observation applies with truth to the leaders in all the subsequent periods of the history of that unhappy country.

[E.] The very persons, who, to-day join in *huzzas* to some favored chief, may be persuaded, to-morrow, to cry *crucify, crucify*; without the proof or reality of a crime. Yet we are told, *that characters shall be tried at the bar of public opinion*. What senseless jargon! The decision would frequently be against the truly meritorious, and in favor of the most worthless. Men wholly destitute of moral principles, by their plausible and insidious conduct, may obtain the public favor, whilst sincere virtue would be reprobated, because it would not flatter and cajole.

[F.] Already the spirit of faction has begun to operate in *America*. Attempts were made to tarnish the reputation of *WASHINGTON*, so early as 1794 and 1795, because he had courage and patriotism to resist the intrigues of *GENET* and other emissaries of *France*; and to maintain a neutral position with regard to the contests between that country and *Great Britain*. As he would not join the French and declare war upon *England*, he was denounced *as a traitor to the cause of liberty, and a friend to monarchy*. And all those who condemned the insolence of *GENET*, were denominated *tories, aristocrats and monarchists*. See the *Aurora* and *Chronicle* for 1794.—That these calumnies and invectives against our *federal* Rulers originated not in patriotic motives, but in ambition and a spirit of party is evident from this consideration (in addition to others which might be suggested) that these opposers of *WASHINGTON*, *ADAMS* and their friends have since been most bitter and abusive to one another. In *Pennsylvania*, Gov. *McKean* was brought into the chair of state by the *antifederal* party, and was highly extolled for his republicanism. But now, as he will not go all lengths with his party and approve of every thing the *leaders of the mob* propose, he is condemned with the greatest severity. In the State of *New-York*, the very men who boasted most of their love of liberty are now divided among themselves; and their disputes for power have arisen to the most dangerous heights. The pretended republicans have become more violent one against another, than they ever were against the federalists. The fact is, that State is governed

by a few families, who have always deceived the people; and thus kept all power in their own hands. They are *Democrats*: Yet each party censures the other with extreme virulence.—And what is still more alarming, some of the leaders, in their late contests for power actually consulted men in the national government, to determine who should be candidates for office. This is a most dangerous precedent. And should it be generally followed, the opinion of *one man* will become the *supreme law*; and the citizens will not dare express their sentiments with the independence of *freemen*.

[G.] “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who would labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness; these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. And let us indulge with caution the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.” See *Washington’s Address*. But this is *old fashioned cant*! We have learnt better—religion has nothing to do with politics, say our wise *democrats*. And *Tom Paine*, that great apostate of Infidelity, is invited to our country to continue his useful labors in the cause of impiety.—Blush, O my Country, at the degeneracy of thy Sons.

[H.] Would it be invidious to enquire, whether the men who were most active in opposing the administration of WASHINGTON, and who now attempt to prejudice the people against the government of this Commonwealth, are remarkable for their morality and piety; or have ever given any evidences of a *patriotic and disinterested* spirit?

[I.] The abuse lately heaped upon Gov. STRONG is a melancholy proof that the most virtuous are not free from censure. Some of the people have no doubt been deceived respecting the character of this excellent man. But others must have opposed him from the most base and malignant motives. For no private or public fault has been proved against him. He has not, like *some other Rulers*, persecuted those who differed from him on political subjects—but has conducted with great mildness, as the Father of the State; not as the *head of a party*.

The first of these is the fact that the
 country is a very fertile one, and
 the soil is very rich. The second
 is that the climate is very healthy,
 and the air is very pure. The third
 is that the water is very good,
 and the food is very fresh.

The fourth is that the people are
 very kind and hospitable, and
 the customs are very simple. The
 fifth is that the government is
 very wise and just, and the
 laws are very good. The sixth
 is that the religion is very pure,
 and the priests are very honest.

The seventh is that the science
 is very advanced, and the
 arts are very beautiful. The
 eighth is that the music is very
 sweet, and the dance is very graceful.

The ninth is that the architecture
 is very elegant, and the
 gardens are very beautiful. The
 tenth is that the horses are very
 strong, and the dogs are very
 faithful.